

Reber Farm  
Private road .1 mi. S of Palisades Road  
.4 mi. E of Gruber Road  
Mount Pleasant vicinity  
Bern Township  
Berks County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-256

HABS,  
PA  
6-MTPLES.V.  
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey  
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service  
Department of the Interior  
Washington, D.C. 20243

## HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

HABS No. PA-256

## REBER FARM

Location:

On private road .1 mile south of Palisades Road (T499), .4 mile east of Gruber Road (LR06038), approximately 2 miles southeast of Mount Pleasant, Bern Township, Berks County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Bernville Quadrangle, Universal Transverse  
Mercator Coordinates: House 18.411740.4470365  
Barn 18.411710.4470315  
Canal store 18.411740.4470410

Present Owner

United States Government

Present Use:

Demolished in 1977 for Blue Marsh Lake project, sponsored by U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

Significance:

This set of buildings constitutes a good example of a prosperous Pennsylvania German family farm. The house is a five-bay stone dwelling with country Georgian proportions and detailing. The barn is a fine example of a medium-sized nineteenth-century Pennsylvania German bank barn. The location of the farmstead is also important since the now defunct Union Canal (which operated from 1828 to 1884) ran within 50 feet of the major farm buildings. Lock #44 was located here and a wooden toll house once stood nearby. The small stone building next to the house may have been a canal store operated as an adjunct to general farming by the Rebers. The proximity of the farmstead to the canal helps account for its prosperity and the relative sophistication of the design of its buildings.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

## A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: The house was constructed circa 1834. A datestone on the house is marked "C. Reber, S.M. Reber April 10th, 1834" C. Reber was Conrad Reber and it is likely that he built the house in the year indicated. The canal store was built in conjunction with the Union Canal, and therefore dates from circa 1835. The long-demolished frame toll house was also constructed circa 1835. The barn and smaller outbuildings probably date from the mid nineteenth century.

2. Architect: As in the case of nearly all Pennsylvania German building, the structures on the Reber Farm were not designed by an architect in the formal sense. The relative sophistication of the design and construction, however, indicates that at least the house, barn, and canal store were planned and executed under the direct supervision of a master builder or mason.

3. Original and subsequent owners: The following is an incomplete chain of title to the land on which the farm is located. Chain of title information for Berks County before circa 1875 is vague and often incomplete, so this data is based on educated guesses using the best available information. Reference is to the Office of the Recorder of Deeds, Berks County, except where noted.

ca. 1750 Source of land to John Reber unrecorded, but probably a proprietary grant from the Penns.

1769 Deed dated February 2, 1769 unrecorded  
John Reber and Magdalene, his wife  
to  
Thomas Reber, their son

1806 Deed dated August 1, 1806 recorded March 11, 1812  
in Book 25 page 314  
Thomas Reber  
to  
Christopher Lash

ca. 1815 Christopher Lash died, leaving the property to John Lash; deed unrecorded.

1825 Deed dated December 7, 1825 recorded April 19, 1826  
in Book 35 page 517  
Daniel Kerper, Sheriff of the County of Berks,  
auctioned the property to satisfy the debts of  
John and George Lash  
to  
Isaac Addams

1826 Deed dated May 2, 1826 recorded May 2, 1826  
in Book 35 page 518  
Isaac Addams and Catherine, his wife  
to  
George Lash and John Gruber

- 1833 Deed dated April 1, 1833 recorded April 5, 1833  
in Book 41 page 241  
George Lash  
to  
John Fisher
- 1833 Deed dated April 3, 1833 recorded April 11, 1833  
in Book 41 page 261  
John Fisher and Elizabeth, his wife  
to  
Conrad Reber
- 1855 Deed dated March 31, 1855 recorded March 28, 1874  
in Book 114 page 233  
Berneville B. Reber and John B. Reber, Executors of  
Conrad Reber  
to  
Levi B. Reber
- 1873 Deed dated March 7, 1873 unrecorded  
Levi B. Reber and his wife, Sophia  
to  
Henry Reber
- 1874 Deed dated March 28, 1874 recorded March 28, 1874  
in Book 114 page 235  
Henry Reber  
to  
Isaac Ruth
- 1875 Deed dated April 10, 1875 unrecorded  
Isaac Ruth  
to  
Francis Ruth
- 1881 Deed dated April 1, 1881 unrecorded  
Francis Ruth and Wife, Magdalena  
to  
Isaac Ruth
- 1891 Deed March 31, 1891 recorded April 2, 1891  
in Book 192 page 535  
Isaac Ruth and Amanda, his wife  
to  
Abraham Yost

ca. 1920 Abraham Yost died, leaving property to Amelia Yost;  
deed unrecorded.

1950 Amelia Yost died, leaving the property to Mary  
Sheidy, Lydia Balthaser, Herbert Yost, Margaret Yost,  
and Beulah Yost, the children of Abraham and Amelia  
Yost

1951 Deed dated April 21, 1951 recorded April 27, 1951  
in Book 1074 page 408  
Herbert Yost, et al.  
to  
Walter S. Weaver

1951 Deed dated May 11, 1951 recorded May 11, 1951  
in Book 1082 page 306  
Walter S. Weaver and Mary L., his wife  
to  
Reginald E. Woodward and Mary G., his wife

1962 Mary G. Woodward died, leaving the property to  
Reginald E. Woodward.

1963 Deed dated August 9, 1963 recorded August 13, 1963  
in Book 1431 page 200  
Cora Schellhammer and David J. Batdorf, Co-Executors  
of the Estate of Reginald E. Woodward  
to  
Theodore A. Consentino and Hannelore, his wife

4. Original plan and construction: This late Georgian style was not at all unusual in the area. Two quite similar stone houses are the Riem-Schmidt-Deppen House (HABS No. PA-264), built in 1791, and the Joseph Conrad House (HABS No. PA-260).
5. Alterations and additions: While the exterior of the house remains largely unchanged, the interior was drastically modernized and re-planned about 1963.

The barn apparently burned in the late nineteenth century, since the timbers on the first floor are hand-hewn, while the timbers on the second floor are sawn. The sawn timbers could very well have been brought in on the Union Canal which ceased operation only in 1884. The canal store was probably converted to a summer kitchen about 1890. The smokehouse was probably added shortly thereafter.

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

The land was originally acquired by the Rebers from the Penns in the eighteenth century. They lost control of the property in 1806, but Conrad Reber re-purchased it in 1833. Conrad undoubtedly built the house at this point since a date block lists C. Reber as a builder in 1834. Conrad also apparently established business relations with the Union Canal Company since both a toll house and a canal house were built on the property. Conrad prospered in his dealings with the Union Canal as the relative sophistication of the house shows. The Rebers again lost control of the farm in 1874; by this time the Union Canal was failing and the farm reverted to full-time agricultural pursuits.

C. Sources of Information:

Arthur, Eric, and Dudley Whitney. The Barn. A Vanishing Landmark in North America. Greenwich, Conn.: New York Graphic Society, 1972, esp. pp. 84-113.

Dornbusch, Charles H. and John K. Heyl. Pennsylvania German Barns. Allentown, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, Vol. 21, 1958.

Long, Amos, Jr. The Pennsylvania German Family Farm: A Regional Architectural and Folk Cultural Study of an American Agricultural Community. Breinigsville, Pa.: The Pennsylvania German Society, Vol. VI, 1972.

Meiser, George, IX. "Historical Survey of Blue Marsh Project Area." Historical Review of Berks County XXXVI (Summer, 1971), 98-110+; general study with good map of the area and the landmarks.

Prepared by Thomas Kneel  
Project Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
August, 1976

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: The five-bay stone house is sturdily constructed with Georgian proportions and detailing. The bank barn features stone ends, a forebay, and seven sets of "Dutch" doors on the downhill side. A one-and-a-half-story stone outbuilding may have been a canal store.
2. Condition of building fabric: Poor

B. Description of Exterior of House:

1. Overall dimensions: The two-and-a-half-story house measures approximately 42' across its five-bay front by 35' deep.
2. Foundations: The foundations are randomly laid rough limestone masonry with corner quoins.
3. Wall construction, finish, and color: The exterior walls of the house are composed of randomly laid rough, gray limestone with corner quoins. There is a datestone marked "C. Reber, S.M. Reber April 10th, 1834" in the gable of the south end wall.
4. Structural system: The house is supported by the outside limestone walls which are about 2' thick. Large wood floor joists support the first, second, and attic floors. The roof has no ridge pole; lapped rafters form the central joint instead.
5. Porches, stoops: In front of the west entrance, there is a concrete stoop approximately 6' x 8'. In front of the east entrance, there is a concrete stoop reached by four stone steps. The south entrance has a stone stoop reached by two stone steps.
6. Chimneys: There is a brick chimney located in the middle of each end wall of the house. They were used to vent fireplaces on the first floor. The chimneys curve in the attic to pierce the roof at the peak on center.

7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The two entry doors have been removed, but they were wood panel doors designed to match the interior paneling and trim. There are modern aluminum storm doors mounted in front of both entry doors.
- b. Windows and shutters: All the windows on the first and second floor have nine-over-six-light double hung sash. There are two, six-over-six-light double hung sash windows in each of the end gables. All of the windows on the first and second floors have wood panel shutters painted black. They are all fitted with the original clasping hardware.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: The roof over the house is the tin was a gable roof covered with tin painted green. The tin was placed over wood shingles (the undersides of which are visible in the attic).
- b. Cornice, eaves: There is a simple wood cornice painted white following the roof line on all four sides of the house.

C. Description of Interior of House:

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: The basement is divided into three rooms and was used for storage and housing of modern service equipment.
- b. First floor: The first floor was totally replanned about 1965. It was originally organized symmetrically around a central hall. Entry was through the west entry door, into a central hall with the stairs to the rear; there were four rooms of approximately equal size located directly off the central hall. At present, the main entry to the house is through the east door. This door leads to a small hall which contains the stairway. The kitchen leads directly off the hall to the north. The mud



room-laundry room leads directly off the hall to the south. There is a large living room running the length of the house opposite the kitchen and the mud room. It is entered through the west entry door and through doors in the kitchen and stair hall.

- c. Second floor: The stairway to the second floor leads to a small hall. There are two equal-sized bedrooms leading off the hall to the north and to the south. The large master bedroom, entered through the bedroom to the north of the stairway, occupies about two-thirds of the length of the house above the living room. The remaining space is devoted to a large modern bathroom, which can be entered from either the master bedroom, or from the bedroom to the south of the hall. All of the bedrooms have closets dating from the remodeling in about 1965.
2. Stairways: The main stairway connecting the first and second floors rises to a landing, turns 180 degrees, and rises to the second floor. The stairway connecting the second and third floors is similarly constructed. The stairway to the cellar is located under the stairway between the first and second floors, and is a straight run. The outside cellar stairs are located at the base of the south end wall, and form a straight run.
3. Flooring: Most of the flooring of the first and second floor is random-width boards covered with wall-to-wall carpeting. The kitchen and mud room floors are covered with modern vinyl tile. The attic floor is wide, rough planks. The cellar floor is packed earth.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls and ceilings on the first and second floors have been recently replastered. The plaster over the wide window reveals has been shaped to form a curved connection between the window reveal and the room walls.
5. Doorways and doors: The doorways connecting the living room to the kitchen and to the stair hall have been shaped to form a slightly pointed arch. All the doors have been removed, but they were originally wood panel doors.
6. Decorative features and trim: All the original Georgian trim was removed when the house was remodeled in about 1965. The wood trim now in place is modern clam shell molding and other simple, modern moldings.

7. Hardware: All the hardware in the house has been removed; however, the original hardware was the heavy wrought-iron type common to eighteenth and nineteenth century Pennsylvania German dwellings.
8. Mechanical equipment:
  - a. Lighting: The electrical system was modernized when the house was remodeled in about 1965. Some of the rooms have lighting fixtures in the center of the ceilings.
  - b. Heating: A central heating system was installed when the house was remodeled in about 1965. This system replaced iron heating stoves and fireplaces.

D. Site:

1. General setting and orientation: The house faces west and is located at the south end of a long private lane. Wide separation of a farmstead from the public road was often a goal in Pennsylvania German farm planning. The house is strategically located since it is only about 50' from the Union Canal bed and 100' from the Tulpehocken Creek.
2. As in the case of nearly all Pennsylvania German farmsteads, there was never a professional attempt to design the farm landscape. The farmstead exhibits the typical Pennsylvania German sensitivity to the rolling contour of the land, however, with the buildings arranged in convenient and visually satisfying ways that take full advantage of the complexities of the site. The barn, for example, was sited to allow for multi-story entry and exposure, while the placement of the main house allowed for direct access to the outbuildings, while still maintaining a distinct sense of separateness. The area around the house has been well planted with shrubs, flowers, and several large trees.
3. Outbuildings:
  - a. Barn: The barn, located about 135' south of the house, faces east and measures approximately 80'-6" by 38'. The end walls, which wrap around on the west or uphill side, and the first floor of the east or downhill side, are

constructed of randomly laid rough limestone about 2' thick. There are narrow ventilation slits as well as a segmentally arched opening surrounded by bricks in each gable end. The barn is constructed of massive timbers pegged together with mortise and tenon joints (a traditional structural system known as fachwerkbau). The timbers on the first floor are hand-hewn, while the superstructure is built of sawn timbers. It is probable that the barn burned in the late nineteenth century and was rebuilt with sawn timbers.

The exterior is covered with vertical planks, painted red with white trim. On the east facade there is a forebay (also known as the vorbau, vorschuss, overhang, overshoot, or overshot), which provided shelter for the seven two-piece "Dutch" doors leading into the first floor. The barn has a gable roof covered by tin painted red. The tin was placed directly over wood shingles, the bottoms of which can be seen from the second floor.

The first floor is essentially two large rooms which have been carefully subdivided into separate stalls and feed alleys, entered separately by the Dutch doors under the forebay. This is an interesting survival of the traditional first-floor plan. Most modern dairymen have substituted one or two rows of easily serviced metal cattle stanchions running the length of the barn for the multiple entry system. The front wall of the first floor is constructed of limestone as is the wall dividing the first floor into two parts. The interior of the first floor has been heavily whitewashed in accordance with state milk regulations and has a partially concreted floor.

On the second floor, the two central bays were originally used for vehicle storage and as a threshing floor; there are partitions to contain the grain being processed. The end bays were storage mows for hay and straw. The first and second floors were joined by two hay holes through which hay and straw were dropped for use on the first floor. There is fully two-and-a-half stories of open storage space above the level of the second floor for piles of hay and straw. There are three built-in ladders dowelled the columns of the trusses to allow for access to the hay lofts. A granary is located in the front southeast corner for the storage of threshed grain. A steel track arrangement runs the full length of the inside of the peak of the roof to provide movement of hay and straw with a hay hook.

The barn has a one-story concrete block addition on the north end for housing modern dairy equipment. There is a barnyard in front of the first floor with two small wood service buildings at the north edge.

- b. Canal store: This one-and-a-half-story limestone building lies about 30' north of the house. Measuring approximately 26' by 19', it has three rooms on the first floor and two rooms in the attic. There is a brick chimney in the northwest corner venting a large, walk-in bake oven with folding wooden doors across the hearth. This building was obviously used as a summer kitchen, but it seems to have been originally a small canal store. The walls on both floors are plastered and the numerous internal subdivisions indicate that something more than cooking occurred here. A small stone smokehouse adjoins the canal store on the east.

Prepared by Thomas Kheel  
Project Historian  
Historic American Buildings  
Survey  
September, 1976

### PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Tulpehocken Creek Survey was undertaken in 1976 by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) and the Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) in cooperation with the Philadelphia office of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in compliance with Executive Order 11593 as a mitigative effort in the construction of Blue Marsh Lake. Under the direction of John Poppeliers, Chief of HABS, and Kenneth L. Anderson, Principal Architect, the documentation was prepared on site by project supervisor Perry Benson (University of Pennsylvania); student architects Robert E. Clarke (University of Notre Dame), Gregory Lee Miller (University of Illinois), Robert Moje (University of Virginia), Daniel F. Clancy (University of Pennsylvania), and Steven M. Shapiro (University of Maryland); and HABS project historian Thomas H. Kheel (Cornell University) and HAER project historian Stuart Campbell (University of Delaware). The drawings were completed in the HABS office in 1977 and 1978 by Mr. Clarke and HABS architects Susan M. Dornbusch and Bethanie C. Grashof. The HABS data was edited for transmittal in 1980 by Alison K. Hoagland of the HABS staff.